



Paradigms of Polity in Serglige Con Culainn

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ULIDIA 3

PROCEEDINGS OF THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE ULSTER CYCLE OF TALES

**IN MEMORIAM
PROFESSOR PATRICK LEO HENRY**

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UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER, COLERAINE 22–25 JUNE, 2009**

**IN MEMORIAM
PROFESSOR PATRICK LEO HENRY, MRIA**

**EDITED BY
GREGORY TONER
AND
SÉAMUS MAC MATHÚNA**

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Maxim Fomin

Paradigms of Polity in *Serglige Con Culainn*

THE wisdom-text ‘Morand’s Testament’ (*Audacht Moraind*) contains an interesting classification of rulers based on their modes of government. In this paper I wish to look at the description of the mythical king of the Otherworld in *Serglige Con Culainn* in terms of the various types of ideal king as outlined in this early Irish wisdom-text.¹

1. *Audacht Moraind* on Principles of Ruling

According to *Audacht Moraind* (hereinafter *AM*), the first (and the best) among ideal rulers is the *fírfhlaith*, ‘a true lord’, who rules according to his righteousness (OIr. *fírinne*). The second is the *ciallfhlaith*, ‘a common sense ruler’, who rules by means of his intellect and reasoning. The third is the *tarbfhlaith*, ‘a bull-ruler’, who is portrayed as a violent and impulsive leader of warrior-bands, ready for attack and aggression. The fourth is ‘the ruler of occupation with hosts from outside’ (OIr. *flaith congbála co slúagaib díanechtair*), but it is not clear from the text what is the precise difference between the last two.

Recension A of *AM* (found in TCD 1298, TCD 1318 and British Museum Add. 33993) says that there are three types of king, but does not immediately provide a list of them; it then goes on to furnish a description of all four.² It arranges their descriptions in the ascending sequence, starting with ‘the ruler of occupation with hosts from outside’, continuing with ‘the common sense ruler’, and moving on to ‘the true ruler’. The ‘bull-ruler’ following the ‘true-ruler’ does look like a digression from the original principle of enumeration. L¹ (contained in the Book of Leinster) says that there are four rulers, lists only three, and provides a description of four:

*Apair fris ní filet acht cethri flathi issin bith .i. flaith congbála co slúagaib anechtair
7 ciallfhlaith 7 fírfhlaith (LL v, 1267.37607–21).*

¹ I have enormously benefited from feedback that I have received following the presentation of my talk at the conference from Dr John Carey whose help I gratefully acknowledge. I am also grateful to Prof. Gregory Toner for his criticisms and useful suggestions. All the remaining errors and misunderstandings are, however, my sole responsibility.

² *AM* (A) §44. *Ní filet inge téora flathi is(s)in bith*, ‘There are only three rulers in the world’. Here and elsewhere the Old Irish text is from my forthcoming edition of Rec. A ([Fomin forthcoming](#)). A conflated edition of recensions A, L and N is to be found in Kelly 1976. Translations are mine unless otherwise noted. Text and translation of paragraphs of recension B of *AM* are from Kelly 1976.

Tell him, there are only four rulers in the world, i.e. the ruler of occupation with hosts from outside, and the common sense ruler, and the true ruler.

L¹'s order of enumeration in the list is ascending, reminiscent of A, starting with a *flaith congbála co slúagaib anechtair*, and finishing off with a *fírfhlaith*. L³ puts *tarbf[h]l[ath]a* at the end of the list, but this may be regarded as a later interpolation. Recension N, contained in the RIA MS 23 N 27, says that there are four types of king, does not provide a list of them, and gives a description only of the first three. Note that from the point of view of nominal declension, *teora flathi* of A, 'three rulers', is correct OIr., following the fem. gender of *flaith*, 'ruler', but *cethri flathi* of L¹ and *ceithre flatha* of N, 'four rulers', are not.

The list preserved in AL¹N recensions is different from the list provided by recension B. In contrast to it, B lists the types of rulers in a descending order, and arranges them in pairs. It starts with the best, *fírfhlaith*, 'a true lord', and finishes off with the worst, *tarbfhlaith*, 'a bull-ruler'. Only B is fully consistent: it says that there are four types of rulers, lists all of them and provides their description after the list:

Apair fris, ní fil inge cethri flathemna and: fírfhlaith 7 cíallfhlaith, flaith congbále co slógaib 7 tarbfhlaith (AM (B) §58).

Tell him, there are only four rulers: the true ruler and the wily ruler, the ruler of occupation with hosts and the bull-ruler.

On the basis of the various recensions one could suggest that the A recension preserves a contradiction in the shared original due to an odd placement of *tarbfhlaith* at the end of classification. The ascending sequence in A ending with a *fírfhlaith*, 'a righteous ruler' at the summit vs. the descending one of B, starting with a righteous ruler and ending up with a bull-ruler, both tell us of the different organising principles of the recensions.

Furthermore, in B, the ideal types of rulers are divided into two pairs, the pairs of opposites, each of which is hierarchically lower to its opponent from the moralistic point of view. The classification can be viewed symmetrically, that is the first two 'ideal types' are the two good ones, in which the first is still better than the second, whereas the last two are the two bad ones, in which the last is worse than the first. The polarity of 'good' vs. 'bad' types of kingship, in which the good one was divided into the 'righteous' and the 'wise', and the bad one was divided into 'the worse' and 'the worst', was current in the imagery of Irish kingship from quite an early stage.³

2. The Theory of Kingship in *Serglige Con Culainn*

Let us now look at the practical example of theoretical constructs, or rather, at the image of ideal kingship as embodied in the Irish saga 'The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn' (*Serglige Con Culainn*, hereinafter SCC).⁴ Although the saga itself, to judge from its title,

³ For further discussion of classifications contained in *Audacht Moraind* see Fomin (2007).

⁴ It is impossible to cover the subject exhaustively. I refer those who are interested in further development of the opposition between the 'righteous' vs. the 'violent' types of kingship in the medieval Irish literature to D. Wiley's (2005, esp. 22–3) discussion of *Scéla Néill Frossaig* and other stories about Níall Frossach contained in the *Fragmentary Annals* (Radner 1978). The image of

is about ‘the mysterious trance or illness which leaves Cú Chulainn helpless for a year’ (Carey 1999a, 190), it is also devoted to the matters of kingship, embodied in the interpolated account of the so-called *tarbfheis* episode and the subsequent utterance by Cú Chulainn of the royal instruction entitled *Bríathartheosc Con Culainn* (hereinafter *BCC*) to his foster-son, the would-be-king, Lugaid Réoderg. Carey proposed a hypothesis that Cú Chulainn’s journey to the Otherworld ‘was originally a visionary one, upon which he embarked while lying in trance, and that the *BCC* is really uttered by Lug, speaking out of Cú Chulainn’s body’ (1999a, 197). Be that as it may, the point introduced here by Carey reflects the outlook of the compiler of the tale: having introduced *BCC* within its plot, the compiler considered the topic of kingship to be important for the tale telling of the sickness of Cú Chulainn and his subsequent journey to the Otherworld. Within the mindset of the medieval Irish literati, the matters of ideal kingship were traditionally kept under the prerogative of the Otherworld (treated as the ideal world).⁵ Therefore, it is not surprising to see other reminiscences of the paradigm of ideal rulership throughout *SCC*. They mostly crop up in the pieces of verse composed by Lóeg or Lí Ban in praise of the king of the Otherworld, Labraid Swift-Hand-on-Sword (*Labraid Lúathlám ar claideb*). And yet, an account of ideal kingship sometimes conveyed conflicting messages: for instance, we shall see that the description of the mythical king of the Otherworld in *SCC* represented a sophisticated mixture of the royal characteristics that in the context of *Audacht Moraind* would match both the *tarbfhlaith* and *firfhlaith* types of kingship.

On the one hand, Labraid is depicted as a legitimate king,⁶ whose rule is peaceful and noble, and is therefore likely to be characterised as the righteous one.

Fo chen Labraid Lúathlám ar claideb ... | rurthech do chách ... | cundail a bríathar ... | carthach a fhlaith ... | tócbaid lobru | tairnid tríunu (SCC §18.192, 194, 197, 200, 211, 212)

Welcome to Labraid Swift-Hand-on-Sword ... | hastening to [please?] everyone | constant his word | caring his rule | he exalts the weak | he humbles the strong.

Atchonnarc tír sorcha sáer | inná ráiter gó na clóen (SCC §34.541–2)

I saw a bright and noble land | in which neither lie nor any incorrect thing is spoken.

This description of righteous kingship agrees in its tone with both recensions of *Audacht Moraind* that similarly portray the good and benevolent rulership as the one that obtains ‘stability, health, peace, joy, tranquillity, well-being, good fortune, profit, repose, whole-

the ‘wily ruler’ (*ciállfhlaith*) can be studied on the basis of the figure of Conchobar mac Nessa. See further *Scéla Conchobuir meic Nessa* and the stimulating analysis by T. O. Clancy (2005, esp. 172–9).

⁵ See T. Ó Cathasaigh 1977–79 and 1981, on the connection between Otherworld prosperity and the worldly order, the latter kept under the powers of the righteous ruler and sanctified by the Otherworld itself.

⁶ Lóeg reports to Cú Chulainn: *Co fúarusá hé sin charnd ina shuí, mílib arm*, ‘I found him seated on the mound, with thousands of weapons’. I am willing to interpret that piece as a reference relating to the Irish inauguration practices: *carn*, ‘mound’ is the descriptive word, evoking the image of the ceremonial stage of the inauguration procedure. See further FitzPatrick 2004, 29–32.

ness of heart’.⁷ Agreeing with SCC both in phraseology and in spirit, compilers of both recensions of *AM* warn the good king not to forget ‘the weak in their sufferings’ (*lobru lén*, *AM* (B) §31) and to stay away from the ‘falsehood of the ruler that brings deranged weather upon wicked people so that it dries up the land’s produce’ (*Ar is gó flatha do-ber sína saeba for túatha cláena, co[n]-sega talman torad*, *AM* (A) §25). The wisdom-text also tells of other aspects of righteous rule not directly connected with good weather and peace: the ruler’s truth (or justice) provides his subjects with fine clothing:

Is tria f.f. cacha tlachta dianime dech morrainniter condat lí súla ségaiter (*AM* (A) §17).

It is through ruler’s truth all the spotless garments are best greatly distributed so that delights of the eye are obtained.

Cach n-étág tlachto do sheallaib súile saigethar (*AM* (B) §26)

Every garment of clothing is obtained for glances of eyes.⁸

Similarly, Labraid’s rule is depicted by Lóeg to Cú Chulainn as follows:

Atchonnarc étach ndatha | *nocon erred anflatha* (*SCC* §34.561–4).

I saw coloured raiment | [it was] not the dress of the ignoble (Dillon 1951, 66, slightly emended).

On the other hand, we shall see further that Labraid’s martial spirit and enthusiasm in battle are strongly emphasised. The view that the early wisdom-texts devoted to kingship are ‘peaceful in spirit’ can no longer be accepted;⁹ the structure of *AM* does actually allow for some martial element in its description of ideal rule: the good ruler is supposed to ward off the enemies from the frontiers of the kingdom,¹⁰ and the warrior-bands are entitled to accompany a king by his right to a retinue.¹¹

⁷ *foss, sláne, síd, subaigi, sám[a]e, soad, sothocath, somaíne, sádaili, slánchridi*, *AM* (A) §13, cf. (B) §14: ‘It is through the justice of the ruler that he secures peace, tranquillity, joy, ease, [and] comfort’ (*Is tre fhír flathemon fo- síd sámí sube soad sádili -sláini*).

⁸ Cf. *étach sirecda*, ‘silken raiment’, as one of the constituents of righteous rule according to *Tecosca Cormaic* (Meyer 1909, 4–5).

⁹ In the words of T. Ó Cathasaigh, the hero, who is destined to be the king, no longer acts in terms of a martial ethic, his life carries on in terms of the pacific ethic: ‘the adaptation of the heroic biography to kingship enables us to draw a distinction between king-heroes like Cormac and martial heroes like Cú Chulainn... the orientation is towards kingship in one case, towards martial heroism in the other’ (1977, 65–6). For a contrary view see McCone: ‘as is obvious from the excerpts like the series *Is tre fhír flathemon*... protection and expansion of the country were ascribed to the king as important duties upon which the “truth” of his kingdom was measured, and because of this great emphasis is placed upon his part in battles and the like’ (1980, 170–2, my translation). McCone later repeated and considerably expanded the points made in this article in chapter 5, ‘Kingship and Society’ (1990, 107–37).

¹⁰ *AM* (A) §11; cf. *ath- mórcaithu fri crícha comnamat -cuirethar*, ‘he dispatches great battalions to the borders of hostile neighbours’ (*AM* (B) §14).

¹¹ *Ad-mestar fíallchu forme fírfhlatho, air is cach ríóg réime recht*, ‘let him estimate the war bands that accompany a true lord, for the rule of his retinue belongs to every king’ (*AM* (B) §46).

It is important to stress that certain characteristics, for which Labraid is praised in the body of SCC, are certainly not the ones that are favoured by the compiler of the A recension of *Audacht Moraind*. Quite frequently throughout SCC Labraid is described as the bloody king, and his martial activity is associated with the colour of blood:

*Atchonnarc tír sorchá saer | inná ráiter gó ná clóen | fil and rí rúamna buden | Labraid
Lúathlám ar claideb* (SCC §34.541–4)

I saw a free and noble land | in which neither falsehood nor any perverse thing is spoken | there is a king [inflicting] bloodshed (lit. ‘reddening’) on hosts there | Labraid Swift-Hand-on-sword.

Cate Labraid Lúathlám ar claideb | ... | dercas rinní rúada (SCC §15.155, 158)

Where is Labraid Swift-Hand-on-Sword? ... he who makes the ruddy spear-points red.

This contradicts the view of A recension of *Audacht Moraind* where a king is warned not to engage in continuous fighting and any kind of martial activities.¹²

Naba rannaire rúamnae góe (AM (A) §30)

Do not be distributor of reddish colours of falsehood.

Ní-corathar a fhlaith eter renna gæ (AM (A) §32)

Let him not put his power between the spear-points.

Níro ranna airlisi imdergga, ar is dórtad cachá flatha fírinne fuilge for lár (AM (A) §35)

He should not distribute reddish enclosures; for bloodlines upon the ground is dissipation (pouring out) of the righteousness of every prince.

Thus it is probably true to say that the compiler of SCC was not interested in drawing the division between *fírfhlaith* and *tarbfhlaith* as far as the figure of Labraid Swift-Hand-on-Sword was concerned. However, the model of description of the Otherworld already existing in early Irish literature implied that to some extent it had to concur with the description of righteous rule.¹³ In this regard, the compiler of SCC followed the descriptive paradigm of the Otherworld, and also attempted to depict its illusionary character. Having described Labraid Swift-Hand-on-Sword as a warrior-king of the Otherworld, and having dealt with matters of kingship in some way, he chose to include a matching description of a king of the human world, and that is probably why the piece, containing the *tarbfheis* episode and the *tecosca* uttered by Cú Chulainn, was composed. Let us now

¹² Cf. also *laimthech a des* ‘daring is his right [hand]’ (SCC §18.200) and *nip fuilech, [níp cuilech]: níp guinech a lám*, ‘he should not be bloodthirsty, he should not be sinful: his arm should not be wounding’ (AM (A) §36).

¹³ This point has been persuasively argued by Ó Cathasaigh (1977–79) and Carey (1999a).

look at the description of Labraid Swift-Hand-on-Sword as a warrior-king of the Other-world contained in the *rosc* passages at the beginning of the saga and see whether their radical tone can be smoothed by the matching sayings of *BCC*.¹⁴

3. *Labraid Swift-Hand-on-Sword Originally Presented as a Tarbfhlaith?*

We will now look at three passages contained between ll. 179–213 of Dillon’s edition, in which various characteristics of Labraid are portrayed. Firstly, we will look at these from the point of view of their structure, patterns of alliteration and different kinds of metres employed. Secondly, we shall try to compare its various collocations with *BCC*’s sentiments and find out as regards their semantics and style.

These three pieces are the so-called *retoric*, the three specimens of alliterative rhythmic verse. They present short rhetorical addresses by Lí Ban to Labraid, and, as Dillon points out, the number of lines varies freely in them. Its opening and closing lines employ internal alliteration, thus *Labraid* alliterating with *lúathlám* and *fóbartach* with *fian*. On a closer look at the first *retoric* (ll. 179–90; see below), it is apparent that one has to allow for linking alliteration as the joining principle of the remaining lines of the piece. If we were to ignore that *buidne* at the end of l. 180 does not alliterate with *snéde* of the following line, as well as that *muíne* does not alliterate with *fóbartach* of the last line, it would be possible to restore linking alliteration between the lines. Thus the examples of simple linking alliteration would be: *claideb: comarbae, góu: créchnaigid, curpu: gonaid, slegaige: slaidid, sciathu: scailid, sóeru: saigid, oirgniu: áildiu, slúagu: sreid*. The word *innaib* (l. 187) poses a problem.¹⁵ It is possible to argue that the original read *aieldiu minnaib*, ‘more stunning than blades’.¹⁶ The reading *minnaib* would provide a perfect example of complex linking alliteration with *manraid* (*m...n: m...n*), in which not only the first consonant but also the second (if one disregards the vowel between) of the last word of the line alliterates with the first and the second consonants of the first word of the next line.¹⁷ The second thing to be looked at is the stress. Lines 180–9 all have two stresses per line, ending with a disyllabic word (with the exception of *slegaige*). It is probably fair to conclude that the following lines represent the original reading of the *rosc* passage (cf. SCC §17.179–90):

¹⁴ There can be no doubt that the work of compiler changed the original message of the tale. See Carey 1994; Fomin 2009.

¹⁵ In his notes, Dillon proposed: ‘an emendation to *mnaib* is possible, but not convincing. The disyllabic ending seems preferable, and *innaib* is the *lectio difficilior*. But *ind* “head, end, point” does not help’ (Dillon 1953, 32.187).

¹⁶ As long as the context of the *rosc* passage appears to be totally concentrated on the martial aspect of Labraid’s reign, it is more attractive to interpret *mind* in the sense of ‘a blade, a weapon’ (see DIL s.v. 2 *mind*) rather than ‘a diadem, a relic’ (DIL s.v. 1 *mind*). From the point of view of palaeography, the end of *aieldiu* and the start of *minnaib* contain eleven minims, and in this context the initial letter of *minnaib* could have been easily dropped out by the scribe. I am grateful to John Carey for this suggestion.

¹⁷ In the definition by D. Sproule, ‘we will take complex alliteration as occurring between two or more stressed words in sequence... when the initial consonants are the same (whether mutated are not...) and the second consonants are the same. In the case of words, beginning with a vowel... when the first consonants in the words are identical’ (1987, 183–95).

<i>Fo chen Labraid Lúathlám ar claideb!</i>	Welcome Labraid Swift-Hand-on-Sword!
<i>Comarbae buidne</i>	The heir of bands,
<i>snéde slegaige</i>	swift [and] possessed with spears,
<i>slaidid sciathu</i>	he smites shields
<i>scaillid góu</i>	he scatters spears
<i>créchnaigid curpu</i>	he wounds bodies
<i>gonaid sóeru</i>	he kills nobles
<i>saigid oirgniu</i>	he seeks slayings
<i>áildiu minnaib</i>	more stunning than blades
<i>manraid slúagu</i>	he destroys hosts
<i>sreid muíne.</i>	he scatters armed bands. ¹⁸
<i>Fóbartach fian fo chen!</i>	Assailant of bands, welcome!

One has to refrain from assigning an early Old Irish date to the *rosc*: the pseudo-archaic acc. pl. form *oirgniu* of a feminine *orgain* shows the hesitation on the part of the scribe to change the ending in order to show that the line follows the similar rhyme-pattern observed in the preceding ones, all ending in *-u*.

Internal linking alliteration (with some examples of complex alliteration) is also found in the next *rosc* (SCC §18.192–203). The lines *augra: urlam, rath: rurthech, chath: créchtach* (SCC §18.192–4, 6) and *bríathar: brígach, chert: carthach, fhlaith: laimthech, des: díglach* (SCC §18.197–201) are organised in pairs, each intending to convey a special message. Thus, the second pair of lines are centred on the idea of generosity (*urlam do rath | rurthech do chách* ‘ready for bestowal, hastening [to please?] everyone’). Then, the next pair is devoted to his fierce behaviour in battle (*saigthech do chath | créchtach a thóeb* ‘eager for battle, battle-scarred his side’), the third is devoted to Labraid’s dispensation of justice (*cundail a bríathar | brígach a chert* ‘constant his word, vigorous is his right’), the line *carthach a fhlaith* (‘caring is his rule’), concentrating on the ideal of benevolence as the quality of a true lord, stands on its own, whereas his martial characteristics abound: *laimthech a des | díglach a gus | tinben laeochu* ‘daring is his right [hand], avenging his vigour, he slays warriors’ (SCC §18.192–203):

<i>Fo chen Labraid Lúathlám</i>	Welcome Labraid Swift-Hand-
<i>ar claideb augra</i>	on-Sword of battle
<i>urlam do rath</i>	Ready for bestowal
<i>rurthech do chách</i>	Hastening to [please?] everyone
<i>saigthech do chath</i>	Eager for battle
<i>créchtach a thóeb</i>	Battle-scarred his side
<i>cundail a bríathar</i>	Constant his word,
<i>brígach a chert</i>	Vigorous is his right
<i>carthach a fhlaith</i>	Caring [is] his rule
<i>laimthech a des</i>	Daring [is] his right [hand]
<i>díglach a gus</i>	Avenging his vigour
<i>tinben laeochu</i>	He slays warriors
<i>Labraid fo chen</i>	Labraid welcome!

¹⁸ Contrary to Dillon, I interpret *muíne* in the sense of ‘armed bands’ (DIL, s.v. 1 *muine*: ‘Fig. of an armed band: *ba uathmar urgránni in muini rúad[d]erg co n-idnu chatha*, LL 237^a31’) as Dillon’s interpretation ‘treasures’ makes no sense in this *rosc* which is otherwise totally dedicated to the martial activities of Labraid.

A similar tone is carried over to the third *rosc* on ll. 205–14. The passage starts with *láechdu* ‘warlike’ (cf. a late form *laeochu* in the previous *rosc*), and finishes off with a pair of lines (*tócbaid lobru* | *tairnid triunu* ‘he raises the weak, he lowers the strong’) reminiscent of the *Magnificat*. The latter are out of place here, and were probably added to moderate the effectively aggressive passion of the composition dictated by the embedded violent message: Labraid is the kingly warrior and his virtues are due to his strength and fierceness in battle (SCC §18.205–13)

<i>Fo chen Labraid Lúathlám ar claideb!</i>	Welcome to Labraid Swift-Hand-on-Sword!
<i>Láechdu ócaib</i>	[He is] more warlike than warriors;
<i>uallchu murib</i>	[He is] prouder than chieftains;
<i>manraid gossa</i>	He crushes the reckless ones;
<i>gniid cathu</i>	He fights battles;
<i>críathraid ócu ...</i>	He riddles the [bodies of] warriors.

It is intriguing that the line *láechdu ócaib* is also contained in a stanza towards the end of the saga. Describing the Otherworld, this poem ‘is almost entirely taken up with praise of Labraid himself, and includes references to exploits beyond the sea and battles against the fabulous Cynocephali’ (Carey 1994, 83), reminiscent of the voyage literature. Cú Chulainn asks Lí Ban: ‘Where is Labraid here?’ (*Cisi airm hi tá Labraid?*), and she responds (SCC §31.421–42):

<i>Atá Labraid for lind glan</i>	Labraid is upon a clear pool,
<i>día n-aithiget buidni ban</i>	where hosts of women visit

Collocations, reminiscent of the ones we have just referred to above (SCC §18.200, 202, 206), crop up in the stanzas written by the interpolator:¹⁹

<i>Laimthech a des tindben cét ...</i>	Daring is his right hand that slays hundreds ...
<i>Lí súla a chnes isin tres</i>	Delight to the eyes [is] his bosom in the combat,
<i>ní mairnd cairdiu a forámles...</i>	He does not betray friends in misfortune ...
<i>Láechdu ócaib</i>	[He is] more warlike than warriors,
<i>amru scéoil</i>	[he is] more wonderful than [his] reputation

4. *Roscada* compared with *Bríathartheosc Con Culainn*’s injunctions

The three alliterative passages scrutinised above contain some intriguing collocations, which, on a closer look, bear a contrastive message in comparison to the instructions uttered by Cú Chulainn to Lugaid Réoderg. It is noteworthy that both compositions are organised in line-internal alliterative sequences, and on occasions use linking alliteration

¹⁹ ‘A late form written by the Interpolator may always be attributed to him rather than to his source. But a substantial contrast does emerge, although the text which appears to be the earlier is the one written wholly by the Interpolator’ (Dillon 1953, xiv). On the role of interpolations and the scribes who compiled (and intervened in the re-compilation of) the manuscript *Lebor ha hUidre*, in which SCC is contained, see now Toner 2009.

as well. In regard to the three pieces of *rosc*, both line-internal and linking alliterative pairs contained in them were discussed in the previous section. As far as *BCC* is concerned, the first part of the *tecosc* is constructed mainly using line-internal alliteration. These are strings of words alliterating with *d* in *debtha déne dóergairce... díscir doichlech díummasach... daíne dochla díchumaing* (SCC §25.263, 264, 269), with a vowel in *ecal ocal opond esamain... ilfhurig im írad n-echtrand* (SCC §25.265, 268) and with *m* in *ó main mandartha mesctha* (SCC §25.266). The second part, starting with *ní íadat iubaili* ‘let prescriptive periods not be established’ and finishing off with *coa nemthe nert* ‘with the strength of their privilege’ (SCC §25.270–7), is constructed using linking alliteration.²⁰ In this regard, both the *rosc*-passages and the *tecosc*-composition are stylistically very much identical.

As far as the subject matter is concerned, both the *roscada* and the *tecosc* observe a stark contrast with each other. In the first *rosc*, Labraid is described as the ‘heir of troops’ (*comarbae buidne*, SCC §17.179), that is, martial bands are his lawful patrimony, whereas Lugaid is dealing with the ‘land of an heir’ (*comarbai cré*, SCC §25.271), consulting memories, judges and historians (*airliter cumni... senchaid... b[r]ethamain*, ‘let memories... aged historians... judges... be consulted’, SCC §25.272–4). Labraid is ‘swift’ (*snéde*, SCC §17.180), and Lugaid is warned to be ‘not too hasty’ (*nírbat rôescid arnábat dóescair* ‘do not be too hasty lest you look ludicrous’, SCC §26.301). Labraid ‘smites shields’ (*slaidid sciathu*, SCC §17.182), whereas Lugaid should ‘not deliver an unnecessary blow’ (*níbat athboingid*, SCC §26.298). Labraid ‘slays the nobles’ and ‘seeks slayings’ (*gonaid sóeru, saigid oirgniu*, SCC §17.186), yet Lugaid is warned not to be a ‘seeker of fierce, ignobly rough strife’ (*nírbat taerrechtach debtha déne dóergairce*, SCC 25.263) and also not to ‘seek infamous, powerless men’ (*ní saís daíne dochla díchumaing*, SCC §25.269). Labraid ‘mutilates hosts and scatters armed bands’ (*manraid slúagu, sréid muíne*, SCC §17.188–9), but Lugaid should not ‘indulge in contentions’ (*níbat comromach*, SCC §26.299). And yet, Lugaid is alerted not to ‘put off [too] much as regards invasion by foreigners’ (*níbat ilfhurig im írad n-echtrand*, SCC §25.268).²¹

As far as other characteristics of a legitimate ruler are concerned, such as his benevolence and generosity, both Labraid and Lugaid are assigned such virtues as being ‘ready for bestowal, hastening [to please?] everyone’ (SCC §18.193–4) or else being ‘gracious in offering, gracious in giving, lending graciously’ (*caín-oís, caín-éra, caín-airlice*, SCC §26.286). Such a rightful ruler as Labraid exhibits other good qualities, including his ‘constant word’ (*cundail a briathar*, SCC §18.197) and his ‘caring rule’ (*carthach a fhlaith*, SCC §18.199). Lugaid is told not to be ‘cold-hearted concerning friends’ (*nípat úarchraidech im chairdiu*, SCC §26.291). And again, these statements in both the *rosc*-passage and in the *tecosc*, are continued with similar admonitions focused on the royal energy and enthusiasm: according to the *tecosc*, a rightful king should be ‘vigorous concerning enemies’ (*gusmar im naimtiu*, SCC §26.292), and in the *rosc*, Labraid’s vigour is characterised as vengeful or punishing (*díglach a gus*, SCC §18.201).

²⁰ For more detailed discussion of patterns of syntax, alliteration and style of *BCC*, see Fomin 2009.

²¹ On the importance of dealing with threats to the land by foreign invasions seen as the disruption of the cosmic order by the early Irish *literati*, see Borsje 2009.

5. Conclusion

In its opening paragraphs *Audacht Moraind* lists mercy among the three things that constitute a proper royal rule, the other two being rectitude and righteousness.²² Other vernacular Irish sagas and wisdom-texts are full of similar sentiments that prescribe mercy for the poor and for the wretched.²³ For instance, the pagan warrior Fergus makes the following claim in the saga ‘The Conception of Cú Chulainn’ (*Compert Con Culainn*): *Am dín cech dochraite. Do-gníú dochur cech tríuin, do-gníú sochur cech lobair*, ‘I am a shelter of every misery. I make damage of every strong one; I make profit of every wretch’ (van Hamel 1933, 8). Characters of this kind seem to be depicted by the authors of the Irish sagas as morally good; therefore, it is not surprising to see the overtones of the Christian *Magnificat* in Fergus’s statement. Cf. *Deposuit potentes de sede, et exaltavit humiles. Esurientes implevit bonis, et divites dimisit inanes*, ‘He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble. He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich he hath sent empty away’ (Luke 1:52, 53).²⁴

We should probably extend this argument to Labraid Swift-hand-on-Sword. He is described as the one who ‘raises the weak’ and ‘lowers the strong’ (*tócbaid lobru, tairnid tríunu*) as was required within the framework of the compositions devoted to kings. He is a king of the Otherworld, and, from the point of view of the source, an able ruler as far as his martial characteristic is concerned. The latter is given much weight in the *rosc*-passages just discussed, and stands in contrast with the prescriptive *tecosc*-composition, outlining a different, moderate type of kingship.

On the other hand, to comply with the view proposed by the compiler of the tale, Labraid was also meant to be morally good – and that is why the lines ‘he raises the weak, he lowers the strong’ are here: they are to restrain the effectively aggressive passion of Labraid as the kingly warrior.

In conclusion, let us look at the introductory story that provides the circumstances of the utterance of *Audacht Moraind*. The wise judge Morand addresses his instruction – through an intermediary – to the new king – Feradach Find Fechnach – who came over to Ireland accompanied by supporting troops to subdue the vassal tribes and to restore his original power.²⁵ In the context of the introduction to the text, Feradach is the ‘ruler of occupation with hosts from outside’. However, he was to overcome the usurpers (*aithechthúatha*, ‘the vassal tribes’) to become the fully-fledged ruler over the whole of Ireland. This supposed development of the storyline provides a connection between the

²² *Beir dó búaid n-dírge... Comath firinni, cotn-ofathar ... ocbath trócairi cotn-uircéba*, ‘Bring him the virtue of rectitude... Let him preserve justice, it will preserve him ... let him exalt mercy, it will exalt him’ (Kelly 1976, 2–5).

²³ And, on the contrary, humbling the haughty: ‘Humiliation is proper for every proud person’ (*Dligid cach diumsach tairnem*, AM (A) §34c); cf. *at-cota dimus tornem* (Ireland 1999, 64, to l.19 (v.l. from RIA 967 (23 N 10)).

²⁴ Cited from the Douay-Rheims translation of the Vulgate. I thank Dr Diarmuid Ó Mathúna for this observation.

²⁵ *Dolluid iarum in Feradachsain i cind ilbliadan i nHerinn co slógaib tairis*, ‘Feradach then came over with hosts to Ireland at the end of many years’ (Rec. L¹, LL v, 1265.37525) = *Do-luid side iarum taris co slógaib* (Rec. B, Kelly 1976, 2.6). For the discussion of the medieval Irish tales *Bruiden Meic Da Réo* and *Scél ar Chairbre Cinn Cait* in which the vassals’ revolt and the subsequent restoration of Feradach to the high-kingship of Ireland is described see O’Connor 2006.

classification of kings based on their status,²⁶ Feradach striving to be at its top as the king of Ireland, and the classification of kings based on their morality. Feradach's rule will eventually become worthy not only to become 'the king of high-kings', but also to become the 'true king', the first among the ideal types propagated, whose blessings, according to the closing paragraphs of the wisdom-text, will include:

Dia-nderna inso huili, bid sen, bid suthain ... biaid cach mí inna bláth, is úad gébthar hÉriu co bráth (AM (A) §52).

If he does all this, he will be old, he will be long-lived ... every month will be in its blossom, it is from him that Ireland will be inherited forever.

²⁶ For discussion of king grades see Kelly 1988, 17–18; Breatnach 1989, 36–7. See also Breatnach 1986a for the discussion of the figure of a *triath*. The *ardrí Érenn* 'the high-king of Ireland' is discussed in Breatnach 1986a and 1986b, 49. For *ruire* see *Bretha Nemed Deidenach* (Gwynn 1942, 33: *Do-eimh ruire riograidh*, 'An over-king protects grades of kings'). The treatise *Bretha Nemed Toisech* (CIH 2219.30–40) describes *rí ruirech* in the following words: *Roimse, feis Temruch, fonaidm rig ruirech nemtiger righ ruirech*, 'Abundance, the feast of Tara, the treaties with over-kings constitutes the king of over-kings'.

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*Abbreviations*¹

- AFM* = O'Donovan (1848–51).
AM = Kelly (1976).
AU = Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill (1983).
BCC = *Briatharthecosc Con Culainn*, in: Dillon (1953, 9–10).
BMMM = Kimpton (2009).
CCC = Windisch (1880, 134–45).
CGH = O'Brien (1962).
CIH = Binchy (1978).
Civ. Surv. = Simington (1931–61).
CMCS = *Cambrian* (formerly *Cambridge*) *Medieval Celtic Studies*.
CPR Jas I = Griffith (1966).
DCDM = Windisch (1891).
DIL = Quin (1983).
Fiants Eliz. = 'Calendar and Index to the Fiants of the Reign of Elizabeth I' Appendix to the 11–13th, 15–18th and 21–22nd *Reports of the Deputy Keeper of Public Records in Ireland*, Dublin (1879–81, 1883–86, 1889–90).
FTB = Meyer (1905b).
Inq. Ult. = Hardiman (1829).
Lec. = Book of Lecan.
LEIA = Vendryes, , *et al.*, *Lexique étymologique de L'Irlandais Ancien*. Dublin and Paris (1959–).
LL = Best, Bergin, O'Brien, & O'Sullivan (1954–83).
LMU = Hull (1949).
LU = *Lebor na h-Uidre* (Best & Bergin, 1929).
NIEA = Northern Ireland Environment Agency.
OSM = Day & McWilliams (1990–98).
OSNB = Name-books compiled during the progress of the Irish Ordnance Survey in 1827–35, National Archives, Dublin.
PSAMNI = Chart (1940).
RIA = Royal Irish Academy, Dublin.
SCC = Dillon (1953).
TBC I = O'Rahilly, C. (1976).
TBC II = O'Rahilly, C. (1967).
TBC III = Nettlau (1894) & Thurneysen (1912b).
TBC-St. = O'Rahilly, C. (1961).
TBFr. = Meid (1974).
TCD = Trinity College, Dublin.
TLA = Breatnach (1980).
Thes. = Stokes, W. & Strachan, J. (1901), Stokes, W. & Strachan, J. (1903).
YBL = The Yellow Book of Lecan.
ZCP = *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*.

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¹ Other textual abbreviations used can be found in the *Dictionary of the Irish Language* (Quin 1983).

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